

Motcombe Meadows' Butterfly Report for the April 1st to September 30th 2020 Season.

I started recording butterflies in the Meadows in 2011 and then sending the results to Butterfly Conservation. However, it was only in 2015 that I started doing my weekly walks during *all* of the 26 weeks in the season as recommended by Butterfly Conservation. A summary of the results is given in Table 1. During this period, Mark Pike has contributed enormously through recording sightings as well as providing excellent photos.

2020: A record breaking season. The season was an excellent one throughout Dorset for most species of butterflies and Motcombe Meadows was no exception. We counted a record total of 7121 butterflies across the 26 weeks and spotted a record breaking 29 different species. *Due to the sunniest and warmest May ever recorded in the UK, most species emerged 2 to 3 weeks earlier than ever recorded before throughout Dorset.*

Two "new" butterfly species recorded for the first time in The Meadows. Perhaps

the highlight of the season was the sighting by Mark of two species never recorded in the Meadows before, namely a **Green Hairstreak** and a **Small Heath** both of which are quite small and fast flying, hence not easily spotted. Both these species are ones whose larval food plants (Green Hairstreak - brambles

Green Hairstreak: Wing span of 27-34mm



Small Heath: Wingspan of 33-37mm.

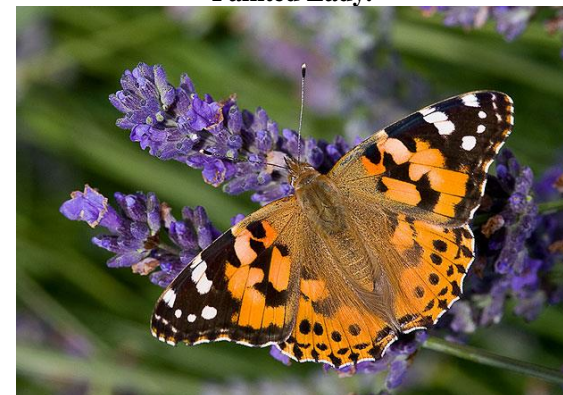


and Common Bird's-foot-trefoil and Small Heath - a variety of grass species) are abundant in the Meadows. We now have to wait until the 2021 season to find out whether these species were just 'one off' visitors from not too distant colonies or whether perhaps they were able to establish new colonies in the Meadows: Time will tell!

Table: The highest number of each species seen during a single walk						
Species	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
1. <i>Small Skipper</i>	91	77	69	45	55	52
2. <i>Essex Skipper</i>	24	26	19	11	13	14
3. <i>Large Skipper</i>	28	23	25	30	22	18
4. <i>Grizzled Skipper</i>	-	-	1	-	1	-
5. <i>Clouded Yellow</i>	-	2	1	1	-	1
6. <i>Brimstone</i>	6	4	5	7	6	4
7. <i>Large White</i>	11	12	7	12	3	12
8. <i>Small White</i>	11	39	16	48	22	34
9. <i>Green Veined White</i>	5	8	6	10	4	6
10. <i>Orange Tip</i>	21	15	14	11	22	17
11. <i>Purple Hairstreak</i>	29	31	26	59	29	41
12. <i>White Letter Hairstreak</i>	*	*	10	27	10	13
13. <i>Green Hairstreak</i>	-	-	--	-	-	1
14. <i>Small Copper</i>	4	2	5	32	37	11
15. <i>Common Blue</i>	5	3	5	15	9	8
16. <i>Small blue</i>	1	-	-	-	-	-
17. <i>Brown Argus</i>	-	1	3	4	7	3
18. <i>Holly Blue</i>	3	1	4	3	3	3
19. <i>Red Admiral</i>	2	6	8	3	3	3
20. <i>Painted Lady</i>	6	3	2	2	15	1
21. <i>Small Tortoiseshell</i>	21	15	16	12	10	14
22. <i>Peacock</i>	13	4	16	6	17	17
23. <i>Comma</i>	6	4	7	5	6	6
24. <i>Dark Green Fritillary</i>	2	1	-	1	1	1
25. <i>Silver Washed Fritillary</i>	-	-	1	1	-	1
26. <i>Marsh Fritillary</i>	1	-	-	-	-	-
27. <i>Speckled Wood</i>	11	11	9	16	10	12
28. <i>Marbled White</i>	83	98	225	98	306	281
29. <i>Gatekeeper</i>	122	71	134	86	94	104
30. <i>Meadow Brown</i>	675	529	592	412	736	746
31. <i>Ringlet</i>	421	210	132	105	183	145
32. <i>Small Heath</i>	-	-	-	-	-	1
Number of species seen during the season	25	25	27	27	26	29
Total number butterflies counted during the season.	5117	3039	5615	3893	6474	7121

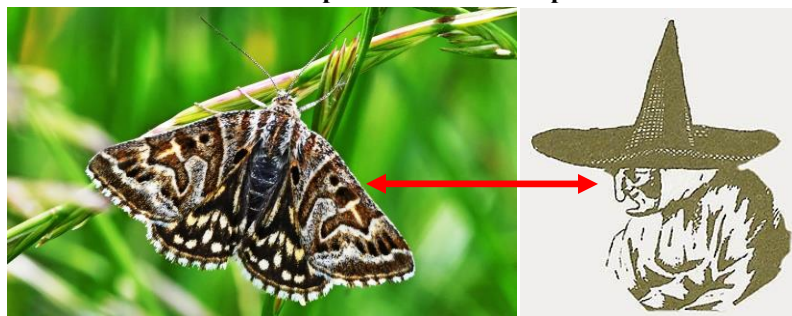
The Meadows was visited by two migrant species. Every year, to a greater or lesser extent, both the **Painted Lady** and the **Clouded Yellow** migrate from N. Africa and southern Europe to the UK. Being on the southwest coast Dorset is usually one of the counties which record quite large numbers in a “good” season. Funnily enough, and in contrast to our native species, 2020 not a particularly good year for either migrating species in Dorset as far as the number of reported sightings was concerned. If you look at Table 1 you can see that 2019 was an especially good year for the Painted Lady but that, in general, the Clouded Yellow is a less frequent visitor. However, in 2020, a single sighting of both species occurred, with the Clouded Yellow in the Meadows being identified as the most ‘northerly’ sighting in Dorset!

Painted Lady.



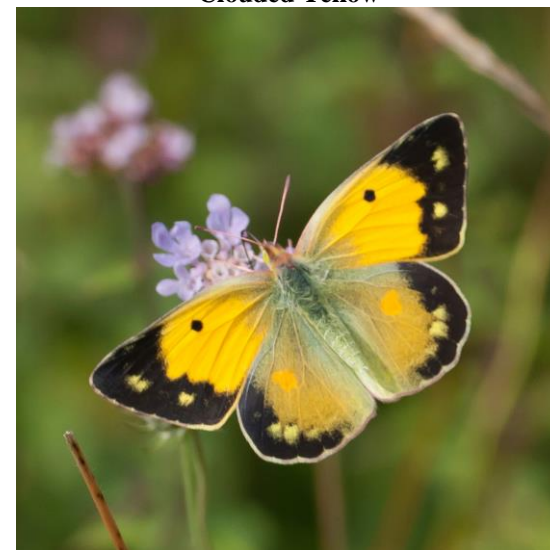
Daytime flying moths highlights. As well as reporting butterflies, we also record and report any

The Mother Shipton moth and her ‘portrait’!



daytime flying moths that we see. 2020 saw the first sighting of the moth **Mother Shipton** by Mark. It has this name due to the fact that the cream outlines on the forewings resemble the features of a 16th century Yorkshire soothsayer and witch known as Old Mother

Clouded Yellow



Shipton! *Judge for yourselves!*

At the beginning of July, we found large numbers of the larva of the Cinnabar moth feeding on Common Ragwort. These striking larvae will pupate over winter and emerge in the spring of 2021 as the equally striking adult moth – worth keeping an eye open for!

Cinnabar larvae feeding on Common Ragwort and the adult moth.



In addition many other species of day flying moths were frequently seen, including **Silver Y - Forester - Small Yellow Underwing - Burnet Companion - Yellow Shell - Five-Spotted Burnet and Straw Dot.**

The impact of Covid-19 and lockdown: The lockdown was well and truly underway when the recording season started (April 1st) and Butterfly Conservation had earlier circulated clear instructions that butterfly recording in all of its transect walks (of which the Meadows is now one) was *not* to be done until the lockdown was eased. This was based on the ruling that counting butterflies did not constitute taking one's allotted amount of exercise time (butterfly recording can take 2 – 3 hours) and that many folk would have to drive for quite some way to reach the location. I decided, on this occasion, to break the rules given that (i) I had to take Dog for his walk each day in the Meadows anyway, (ii) my home is only half a mile away and (iii) I was closer to folk outside my 'bubble' at home with neighbours on either side than I ever was in the Meadows where I literally hardly saw a soul during lockdown! As a result, we were able to achieve a complete 26 weeks' worth of data and, as far as I am aware, were the only location in Dorset to do so.

Another casualty of the lockdown was the cancellation of the Butterfly Conservation Field Day in early July. Every year Butterfly Conservation selects 4-5 locations in each county and asks if they would be prepared to hold a field day, both for members and anyone else who is interested and would like to turn up. Motcombe Meadows had already held 2 pretty well attended field days in previous years and the Parish Council had once again shown enthusiastic support for the 3rd! Regrettably, the decision was made to cancel all scheduled field days including ours, even though the lockdown restrictions had been largely removed by July.

The production of a chart showing when Motcombe Meadows species are on the wing. Because it was such an excellent year for butterflies and also because, I imagine, folk had a great deal more time on their hands, a huge amount of interest was shown by Motcombe folk in our butterflies and I received all sorts of request for information about what was being seen and what might be expected to be seen! "*This is Alfred*" from Shaftesbury even contacted me twice for an interview and I obligingly waffled on! But more importantly, I had time to produce the chart shown in the Annex on the last page which was made available to anyone who asked.

ANNEX 1: Chart produced and made available to any interested person in Motcombe.

MOTCOMBE MEADOWS BUTTERFLY CHART SHOWING THE MONTHS WHEN SPECIES ARE ON THE WING. (Shading indicates periods when you can expect to see each species: those shaded in black are periods of peak activity: NOTE that several species have more than one brood per year.)									
REGULAR BUTTERFLIES SEEN EVERY YEAR									
Family	Butterfly Species	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct
Skippers (<i>Hesperiidae</i>)	Small Skipper								
	Essex Skipper								
	Large Skipper								
Whites and Yellows (<i>Pieridae</i>)	Brimstone								
	Large White								
	Small White								
	Green-veined White								
	Orange Tip								
Hairstreaks, Coppers and Blues (<i>Lycaenidae</i>)	Purple Hairstreak								
	White-letter Hairstreak								
	Small Copper								
	Brown Argus								
	Common Blue								
	Holly Blue								
Vanessids (<i>Nymphalidae</i>)	Red Admiral								
	Painted Lady								
	Small Tortoiseshell								
	Peacock								
	Comma								
Browns (<i>Satyridae</i>)	Speckled Wood								
	Marbled White								
	Gate Keeper								
	Meadow Brown								
	Ringlet								
OCCASIONAL BUTTERFLY VISITORS									
Fritillaries (<i>Nymphalidae</i>)	Dark Green Fritillary								
	Silver-washed Fritillary								
Yellows (<i>Pieridae</i>)	Clouded Yellow								